

WASHINGTON – Last night the U.S. House of Representatives passed the State-Foreign Operations appropriations bill for Fiscal Year 2008, including language authored by U.S. Reps. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) and Rob Andrews (D-N.J.) ordering the State Department to report to Congress on the feasibility of restricting gasoline to Iran as a way to pressure the regime to give up its nuclear ambitions.

“As Iran continues to defy the U.N. Security Council and International Atomic Energy Agency, we need to explore new economic sanctions to augment our diplomacy,” said Kirk, a member of the State-Foreign Operations Subcommittee and a Naval Reserve Intelligence Officer. “A restriction of gasoline to Iran would pit our greatest strength against the Mullahs’ greatest weakness.”

“Extremist powers in Iran have continued to defy the world, endangering citizens of all countries. A nuclear Iran is not an option for the global community,” said Rep. Andrews. “This provision will help to supplement the United States’ options to require Iran to abandon its nuclear program or face severe economic hardship thereby threatening the current Iranian regime’s power”.

Despite its status in the front rank of oil producing nations, Iran is highly dependent on the importation of foreign gasoline due to severe mismanagement of its domestic energy supply. More than 40 percent of Iran’s gasoline must be imported. Antiquated refineries and increasing demand drove Iran to rely heavily on imported gasoline. The need is so great that the Iranian government this week renewed its debate over rationing gasoline.

Earlier this year, Kirk and Andrews introduced a resolution calling for new U.N. sanctions including a gasoline restriction. The resolution, H.Res.267, passed unanimously through the Foreign Affairs Committee with 62 bipartisan co-sponsors but did not receive a floor vote.

Iran is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and is also a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Last month, IAEA Director General Mohammed El-Baradei announced that Iran had overcome its technical difficulties and now possesses the knowledge to enrich uranium to weapons-grade level. The head of Iran’s Atomic Energy Organization later announced the Iranian nuclear program was moving ahead as scheduled toward its previously stated goal of 50,000 centrifuges running at its Natanz facility. Days later,

the IAEA reported that Iran not only ignored the Security Council's deadline to stop enriching uranium but markedly expanded its enrichment program.

Kirk and Andrews founded the bipartisan Iran Working Group more than two years ago to help educate members of Congress on the Iranian nuclear program and explore diplomatic solutions to avoid conflict. Since its formation, the study group hosted briefings by representatives from the British, German, French and Israeli governments along with the U.S. State Department and world observers like Tom Friedman.